



February 24, 2021

The Honorable Grace P. Napolitano
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment
Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman Napolitano:

On behalf of the California Association of Sanitation Agencies (CASA), I write in support of the Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment's ongoing efforts to address the vital need for clean water infrastructure investments. CASA supports the draft proposal entitled Water Quality Protection and Job Creation Act of 2021 and requests that this letter be included in the formal record of the subcommittee hearing held February 23, 2021.

CASA represents more than 125 local public agencies engaged in the collection, treatment and recycling of wastewater to protect public health and the environment. Our mission is to provide trusted information and advocacy on behalf of California clean water agencies, and to be a leader in sustainability and utilization of renewable resources. We believe the draft's provisions to address the well documented funding needs of our nation's wastewater infrastructure depend upon a robust federal partnership with local clean water agencies. CASA is encouraged that the subcommittee is building upon the progress of last Congress's efforts embodied by the Moving Forward Act (H.R. 2). As this legislation progresses, we also encourage the subcommittee to include specific funding for disadvantaged communities, innovative monitoring and treatment technologies that could reduce treatment costs, and alternative financing tools to help stretch limited resources.

The reality of our clean water infrastructure being systematically underfunded is not new. In the 2012 Clean Water Needs Survey, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) estimated that \$271 billion is required to support the nation's wastewater infrastructure. This estimation is now a decade old and does not account for the severe economic impacts on state and local governments and individual utilities as a result of the pandemic. As we grapple with the pandemic and the importance of safe and reliable water supplies, the need to redouble our commitment to improving water quality and modernizing the nation's clean water infrastructure could not be clearer. We appreciate the opportunity to provide our comments to the subcommittee on the discussion draft.

Section 3. Watershed Pilot Projects

CASA supports the authorization of \$200,000,000 for each of the fiscal years 2022-2026 to support watershed pilot projects. This investment will help support healthier watersheds by

funding innovative approaches to address water quality impairments. Watershed protection efforts that address impacts originating within a watershed are a vital approach to achieving significant water quality improvements. The use of integrated partnerships between municipalities and property owners, establishing best practices for stormwater and wastewater management, and enhancing resiliency of treatment works facilities can deliver improvements through a watershed approach, and the funding provided in this section will help to advance such programs.

Section 4. Pilot Program for Alternative Water Source Projects

We strongly support the authorization of \$1,000,000,000 to support alternative water source projects. CASA is pleased that the draft includes “wastewater, or stormwater or by treating wastewater or stormwater” in the definition of alternative water source projects. In California, and across the West, the security of our water supplies is constantly in flux due to extreme weather events as a result of climate change, such as drought, wildfires, and reduced snowpack. The need to think innovatively to identify alternative water sources that can help enhance the resiliency of our water supplies during extreme weather events is critical. Section 4 of this draft recognizes this and makes the necessary federal investment to help states create resilient water supply portfolios.

Section 6. Grants for the Treatment of Emerging Contaminants

CASA strongly supports the draft’s federal investment to help owners and operators of publicly owned treatment works implement future pretreatment standards for perfluoroalkyl or polyfluoroalkyl substance (PFAS) and other emerging contaminants of concern. Any effort to rely upon the wastewater treatment process to monitor and treat for PFAS contamination puts additional financial burden on already financially stressed utilities. CASA recommends the authorization of federal assistance to support clean water agencies implement new measures that might be mandated. CASA notes that the presence of such “forever” chemicals are a function of industrial production and public agencies are simply receivers of these wastewater discharges. We should not ask our ratepayers to pay the costs of such treatment and monitoring when the source of the discharge is known and can be addressed similar to other pollution reduction management programs.

Section 7. State Water Pollution Control Revolving Funds

CASA strongly supports the authorization of \$40 billion over five years for the Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund (CWSRF). The authorization addresses two important matters.

First, it would establish certainty that federal government will maintain a strong partnership with states local agencies for years to come. According to the American Society of Civil Engineers’ 2019 infrastructure report card, California’s clean water agencies have more than \$26 billion in needs over the next two decades. This type of sustained commitment to the Clean Water SRF program, which serves as the backbone of clean water infrastructure financing in our state, is essential. Second, it reaffirms that the nation needs to address the documented funding gap that will only continue to grow as climate impacts such as sea level rise, flooding, drought and population migrations take a toll on our clean water infrastructure.

While increased funding is vital to assist in our long-term response to improve public health and the environment, we also believe the mechanism to allocate funding to states needs to be addressed. CASA recognizes that this can be the third rail of clean water funding. However, the challenges that our agencies confront have changed dramatically since 1987 when the CWSRF allocation formula was last updated. USEPA conducted a study on the allocation formula and found that the existing approach is fundamentally failing to deliver equitable assistance to states based upon needs and other factors. In order for the CWSRF to meet the needs of the nation's clean water infrastructure, the allocation formula must be updated to reflect current and future population and treatment demands.

Section 8. Indian Tribes

CASA supports the draft's provisions of the clean water needs of tribal communities. The priority to address communities that lack adequate and reliable water quality infrastructure is vividly illustrated by such communities. A dedicated \$2.5 billion in wastewater infrastructure assistance to tribal communities is vital to improving the health and economic conditions of some of the most disadvantaged regions of the nation.

Again, thank you for your continued attention to the needs of the nation's clean water infrastructure and the desire to provide strong federal investment to address the challenges facing our systems and create new systems capable of meeting the environmental and public health protections of the future. If CASA can be a resource for you or the subcommittee in the future, please do not hesitate to contact me at alink@casaweb.org or (916) 446-0388.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Adam D. Link". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Adam" being more prominent than the last name "Link".

Adam D. Link
Executive Director